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C O N F I D E N T I A L CARACAS 003271

SIPDIS

NSC FOR C. BARTON
USCINCSO ALSO FOR POLAD

E.O. 12958:
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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [VE](#)
SUBJECT: VENEZUELAN AMBASSADOR DISCUSSES BILATERAL AGENDA

Classified By: Political Counselor Abelardo A. Arias for
reason 1.4 (d).

SUMMARY

1. (C) Venezuela's Ambassador to the U.S. Bernardo Alvarez_ told us October 18 he is amenable to meeting with National Endowment for Democracy (NED) President Carl Gershman to discuss GoV perspectives regarding NED support to NGOs such as Sumate. In a breakfast meeting with Ambassador and PolCouns, Alvarez_ also welcomed the Ambassador's offer to begin discussion of ideas for an agenda for possible bilateral discussions. The Ambassador noted that better communication can help with issues such as the Sumate controversy or trafficking in persons. Alvarez_ highlighted the cooperation on the case of the Venezuelan soldiers seeking asylum whose extradition has been requested as a sign of how an issue can be handled positively. End Summary.

2. (C) The Ambassador and Venezuela's Ambassador to the U.S. Bernardo Alvarez_ met over breakfast at the Residence October 18. PolCouns and MFA Director General Temir Porras accompanied the Ambassadors.

3. (C) Discussing the case against the NGO Sumate, Alvarez_ told the Ambassador that he had received a letter from National Endowment for Democracy (NED) President Carl Gershman prior to leaving Washington requesting a meeting. Alvarez_ said he was amenable to such a meeting to help resolve the controversy over NED funding for Venezuelan NGOs. The Ambassador encouraged Alvarez_ to speak with Gershman as soon as he returned. Having such a meeting, the Ambassador emphasized, would be an important first step, especially since the GoV could expect more Washington attention to the Sumate case. Alvarez_ acknowledged that the GoV's pursuit of the Sumate is costing him some of the ground he has gained for the GoV in Washington.

4. (C) Alvarez_ told the Ambassador that, unlike USAID activities which focus on reconciliation, the NED's \$1 million funding of activities in Venezuela since April 2002 has been directed at undermining the GoV. He warned that researchers looking into the activities are tracing the links of government opponents to the NED and then the Department of State. Alvarez_ asked rhetorically whether it is not against U.S. law for organizations to receive funding for political reasons. (The Ambassador told Alvarez_ he believed our only restrictions relate specifically to election campaign funding.) He said he ensures that "his people" maintain meticulous records to comply with the Foreign Agents Registration Act.

Pursuing the Bilateral Agenda

5. (C) The two Ambassadors agreed that it is important to find avenues to improve communications between our two governments. The Ambassador offered to put together for Alvarez_ a list of possible points for discussion which the Venezuelans could consider and amend. Once we have agreement on the list of points here, the Ambassador said, he would then propose them to Washington. Determining whether or at what level the discussions would take place would follow, he told Alvarez_.

6. (C) The Ambassador noted that what occurred with the trafficking in persons report, and subsequent sanctions, is an example of the need for better communication. He told Alvarez_ that we understand that the GoV may have been otherwise preoccupied between June and August, but now the effects were being felt as with the World Bank loan for Venezuela's judiciary.

7. (C) Alvarez_ noted that recent developments in the case of the two Venezuelan soldiers (who sought asylum in the U.S. and whose extradition the GoV has requested) were a sign of how the two sides can handle an issue positively. Alvarez_ added that we "could expect paper" on (the extradition) of

Robert Alonso soon. (Note: The GoV has charged Alonso in the case of the alleged Colombian paramilitaries who reportedly were poised to attack Caracas earlier this year.) Alvarez_ also suggested that the GoV would like to move to

conclude the Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty.

Comment

18. (C) Alvarez_ was clear that the GoV would like to pursue talks with us. He accepted that there are areas where we are not going to find common ground, but is willing to test the waters in others. As for Sumate and NED, he gave no indication that the GoV would relent. To the contrary, taking note of his warning about the work of researchers, there is more in store, including the possibility of gambling on making Sumate's Maria Corina Machado a martyr. While some parts of the GoV may attempt to disassociate themselves from aspersions cast against U.S. institutions and the USG, we do not expect them to bring them to a halt.
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